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ABSTRACT

A group of 12 disadvantaged women--mostly Mexican-Americans, Negroes, and Yaqui Indians--were enrolled in a twelve-week Migrant Opportunity Program at the Early Childhood Education Laboratory of the University of Arizona in order to train them as preschool teacher aides. Some reading materials were developed by the laboratory staff, but the primary emphasis was on learning through experience. Arrangements were made for the trainees to observe the behavior and responses of children from infancy through age six, and microteaching demonstrations were critiques to identify principles of learning and concommitant adult responsibility for systematized organization and methods of teaching. Teachers criticized their own performance as a model of self-analysis for the trainees. Practice in the use of art media, playing games, and story telling was informal. Statements by aides at the end of the program indicated that they felt they had developed a sense of self-confidence and had learned to communicate with children. They also felt they had developed better relationships with their own children as a result of the program. [Not available in hardcopy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (RT)

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Teachers and the Education of Aides

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TEACHERS AND THE EDUCATION OF AIDES

Paraprofessionals Develop Professional Skills

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NEATLY AND ATTRACTIVELY GROOMED, my middle-aged student and friend fits a pictorial stereotype of a very proper and confident school teacher. Even in her speech, her sense of appropriateness can disguise for some time her language limitation and her social origin. This woman was raised in the migrant camps, following her parents up and down the rows of vegetation in field after field. Her earliest memory is an unhappy one, when she was punished for failure to care properly for her baby brother in the fields. An eighth-grade dropout, she continued to follow the seasons from field to field with her husband and children. When her husband became disabled, she moved into a stationary migrant center in the cotton area of Arizona and, with the recent advent of the Migrant Opportunity Program, found employment as an aide in a Child Development Center. There, according to both the community board and the one professional Center director, she became a most valued employee. Stimulated and motivated by this new experience, she enrolled in a high school equivalency class (G.E.D.), seized the opportunity to train further in the Early Childhood Education Laboratory of the College of Education of the University of Arizona and now plans to take some junior college courses.

M.O.P. Student Group

Training with this M.O.P. (Migrant Opportunity Program) aide were 11 other women from four migrant centers in Arizona, ranging in age from 24 to 50, all mothers, having among them 49 children. One had 10 children. They were 1 Mexican migrant, 7 Negroes, 2 Yaqui Indians, 1 Mexican-American and 1 Anglo. One high school graduate was in the group.

Place of Training

The spacious open rooms of the Early Childhood Education Laboratory in the College of Education at the University of Arizona provided the setting for a twelve-week training program for these twelve women. A room was set aside for their exclusive use, but they moved freely in and out of offices and among researchers in the Center, engaging in much conversation. The staff members were so delighted with the simple, genuine spontaneity of these women that the interaction was easy and happy.

In their room, two-way glass windows permitted their observation, without disturbance, of programs with children. This room, equipped with cribs and other appropriate furniture to meet infancy needs was, overnight, rearranged with centers of interest for the preschoolers. Such classroom rearrangements were frequent and facilitated behind-the-scene observations of children and of micro-teaching of children from infancy to six. .

Training Philosophy

After several years devoted to the development of a new primary curriculum for poverty schools in cooperation with Tucson School District No. 1, the staff of the Laboratory[1] when first confronted with the training project experienced a little stage fright about a twelve-week training encounter with the twelve paraprofessionals. But the staff, as a group, was committed to a belief in the fundamental, universal truths of human learning that would be applicable both to child and adults and which would, of necessity, eliminate the more conventional text-based content course in child development. Furthermore, they were all altruistically committed to a training program that would "screen in" rather than "screen out" despite a real deficiency of most trainees in oral and written English and in reading ability. Of course, a more extended period of training would have been desirable, including a laboratory arrangement to cultivate more language skills both to facilitate the intellectual development of the aide and to cultivate a better language model for the children. Printed materials used could not be assigned effectively for out-of-class reading although such assignments were made, using basic English material developed specifically by staff for this group. They were "reviewed" later by an instructor reading aloud to them, with many pauses permitting discussions to facilitate comprehension.

It was, philosophically, the consensus of opinion of the training staff

[1] The Early Childhood Education Laboratory in the College of Education at the University of Arizona, directed by Marie Hughes, contracted with the Migrant Opportunity Program to train 12 women or aides in Child Development Centers from September 11, 1968 to December 1, 1968.

Delegated by Marie Hughes to Ronald Henderson, and coordinated by Mrs. Hobson, the training program involved all staff members in demonstrating, leading discussions, lecturing, and critiquing performance. These included Ralph Wetzel (psychologist), Ted Rosenthal (psychologist), Roger Yoshino (sociologist), Mrs. Mary Frobisher (educator), Roger Tharpe (psychologist), Dr. Christensen (counseling), Mrs. Marian Martin and Mrs. Underwood (graduate students in psychology).

that logically sequenced material moving from one prerequisite to another was not basic to their learning. Despite their limited backgrounds, these paraprofessionals should be able to comprehend highly sophisticated concepts provided there was a real interpretation of principles of learning through an application *of* these principles with the child himself.

The training experience involved work with children from infancy through six. Arrangements were made for the trainees to observe the child for evidence of specific behaviors, for the variety of responses to people and to specific materials. Micro-teaching[2] demonstrations with children from infancy through six were thoroughly critiqued to identify principles of learning, with the concomitant adult responsibility for systematized organization and methods for teaching. A variety of micro-teaching opportunities permitted the trainee, then, to apply this new knowledge with respect to the individual child and child groups. It was considered important that modeling should precede theorizing, thus giving reality to the theory. The theory was slowly but carefully refined from global awareness to increasingly discriminating concepts that could be grasped because they were not dependent upon verbalism and pedagese, being born from concrete experiential evidence.

For example, the first two weeks were devoted to infancy and to demonstrating that infants do learn and that "smartness" (the term used with the trainees) results from environmental and adult stimulation of the infant. For example, they recognized that when an infant increases cooing in order to hold the adult's attention, he is behaving in a "smart" way. Furthermore, he can be taught this "smartness" by rewarding adult response and adult verbalization whenever he vocalizes. When he looks for the rattle that fell to the floor he is remembering, a most necessary skill for learning. Therefore, peek-a-boo games are really lessons to teach remembering. These demonstrations (with real, live babies) were followed by the aides' practicing the principles of learning that they had identified. As they practiced verbal and social reinforcement principles in order to increase desired behaviors, they came to the realization that reinforcement applied discriminatingly is simply systematizing the natural adult role that they had already used but perhaps inconsistently and with less discrimination.

These women all genuinely loved babies and were physically generous about cuddling any infant, providing adult warmth and security. After the first two-weeks of observation and practice with infants, the idea that "love is not enough" needed no argument. They saw, they practiced and they believed in accepting their roles as teachers by virtue of being adults.

[2] Micro-teaching has been defined by the staff of the Early Childhood Education Laboratory of the University of Arizona as that which is designed for the purpose of abstracting a single focus for demonstration, observation, experimentation, cultivation of skills, and development of materials. A group specific for micro-teaching consists of at least one adult and no more than five children.

After Infancy

"Twos" and "threes" were brought into the laboratory where a training room had been rearranged with appropriate centers of interest. The trainees were asked to observe how experienced teachers interact with the children and then to serve with these same teachers as aides in a microteaching experience. In the critiques following these demonstrations, the teachers pointed out their own awareness of "goofing" at times, thus demonstrating that a truly professional teacher self-monitors, regards objectively his approximations of stated objectives. The aides quickly understood this model of self-monitoring of interaction and adopted quite naturally and without exhortation the attitude and responsibility of self-analysis.

Discussion and Reflection

The staff drew from the aides their home-distilled knowledge of child development and awareness of the child's efforts to organize and understand his world. As the staff generously reinforced the aides verbally, the aides recognized that by consciously revealing their insights they would be better able to observe the individual child's learning and could thereby more systematically and skillfully interact with the child. In their first week of training they expressed great concern about misbehavior and genuine distress that they had not been permitted to punish as they saw fit in the Child Development Centers. The staff, with candor, asked them to postpone discussion of their concerns of discipline until they had built, sufficiently, background to enable them to look more objectively and more sensitively at the behavior of children.

As they developed more sensitive interaction skills with the children and discovered great delight in the child as a unique individual and a persistent learner, the aides requested more class time to reflect upon their roles as parents. They reported changes in their home relationships, and particularly expressed anxiety about guiding husbands and neighbors to their insights and refined discriminations. One father spent a day at the training session; he was so interested in the new ideas his wife had expressed that he had arranged to hear and see more of it first hand. He indicated that he and his wife were attempting to operate differently with their children so that they would grow up to be "smarter."

The staff suggested in English that was decidedly basic that:

1. Children can become smarter
2. Smartness can be taught
3. Infants are learners
4. Learning happens at all ages
5. All grown-ups are teachers because,
   a. they model
   b. they give information
   c. they explain
   d. they question

e. they reinforce

6. Talking helps learning.

Results

Despite their poor skill in written English, the trainees were able to make thoughtful and perceptive observations.[3] One aide wrote:

> "Little girl asked, I put the paper on the shelves so that the wind wouldn't blow away. The teacher commented, that's a good idea, you often have such good ideas."

This aide's awareness of reinforcement specific to the activities of the child having good ideas indicated considerable growth on the part of this particular aide.

Another new aide wrote:

> "I played with Nick using the beach ball we had taken. This little boy was quite and did not smile. At first he had a little know of worries tightening up his insides, but a little while later, he tried to push a ball and give a very small smile. I kept on doing this for awhile after I gave him a toy."

Here the aide expressed recognition of the fact that simply being responsive to the individual was, in itself, reinforcing to his social participation, making it worth his while to respond to other human beings.

Another observaton by an aide read:

> "At first, I was unable to get Christian to talk, I turned the leafs in the magazine, no response. She brought one to me I began again turning leafs and naming objects, pretty soon I turned to an orange, she said, 'see there' and I began to turn to more pages, when I came to more fruit she began to say more words. All of my turning and repeating gave no response until I turned to something she really liked."

She added:

> "We have a possibility of training them more accurately if we find something that really get their attention."

This statement by a Negro aide, a woman who had failed her G.E.D. examination, indicates that she was quite capable of recognizing *how* to get a child to attend so that she could teach something to the child.

Learning by Doing

In developing a repertoire of skills such as the use of art media, playing games, finger plays, creative dance, and storytelling, the staff members observed that the aides considered the value of the activity heightened if they could "do" rather than "talk" about it.

One effective art workshop session, for example, consisted of avail-

[3] The reports of the aides are presented verbatim, with no correction of the language.

ability of many media in one room with an instructor who simply moved among the women responding to their enthusiasm and helping them to explore with the media. These trainees, discovering for themselves the joy of finger painting for the first time, supplied each other with many ideas about the use of the product. The instructor was wise enough to arrange for these twelve adults to discover for themselves much about which she could have, perhaps, lectured with more personal efficiency. But she knew that what might be considered an efficient presentation for her was not necessarily effective teaching. By design, an excess of materials was available. As was anticipated, the aides asked if they could have some for their own children and all took something home. The day following the workshop the trainees reported joyously about happy family explorations of the materials.

Following a period devoted to building toys as teaching tools, these women volunteered the information that when they purchased their weekly groceries, they had squeezed a few pennies to buy materials for toy construction or to buy games for their families.

One aide said,

> "I see you talk to children with the same kind of voice and in the same kind of words you talk to me. I see they like you and like to talk to you. I been wondering why my girls be so scared of me and not talk to me. Me and my husband, we talk about this and we try what you do. Now we all be happy together. It's cause I see the way you talk to children."

This is perhaps the most basic message that seems to have been conveyed to the women whom we were privileged to meet in the training session of the Child Development Aides of the Migrant Opportunity Program within this state. They found the way to talk to children.

In a letter to the training staff of the Early Childhood Education Laboratory, the aide mentioned at the beginning of the article wrote:

> "The training I had at the University is definitely helping me in my work with the children. It also has given me more confidence in myself to know I am teaching the right thing at the right time."

There are two indications of real growth that emerge from the above statement. There is a sense of self-worth with a discriminating base, a reason for knowing one's own value. There is an awareness of appropriateness, a realization that rightness of behavior is related to rightness of situation. For lifting all this into consciousness so that this woman could begin to realize her potential and so that children of deprivation and all of society could benefit by it, the staff of the Early Childhood Education Laboratory of the College of Education of the University of Arizona would suggest that a basic ingredient for whatever success can be claimed was the dignity ascribed to the aides as individuals, coupled with an effort to so arrange their training program that the trainees were aware of expectations for them as continuous learners at a high level.